

Testimony of Marissa Kach
Connecticut School Counselor Association
in regards to

H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing - February 17, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Marissa Kach and I am a school counselor at Salem School. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding HB5037- An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023.

Specifically, I am here today to testify about the importance of school counselors and the need to fund additional school counselors so that every student has access to a school counselor.

We are in the middle of a mental health crisis in Connecticut directly due to the impact COVID-19 has had on students and families. There is an increase in students experiencing anxiety and depression. School Counselors are the only mental health providers specifically trained in meeting the social and emotional needs of the whole school.

At Salem School, I am the sole counselor at my school for close to 400 students. I work closely with a school psychologist and social worker. These roles are all critical to meeting the mental health needs of our students. Although the roles overlap, they are very different. I use Universal Screening to identify the mental health needs of our school. I am the only one who provides Social and Emotional Learning for the entire school through classroom instruction K-8) to meet the needs of all students. I also provide individual and group counseling on a regular basis for students who need more support. I can tell you right now there are more students that need this support than one counselor can reach.

As a K-8 school counselor, I know first hand how critical interventions are for social and emotional needs at a young age. Did you know that only 25% of our elementary students have counselors? I think this is due to the lack of public knowledge of the role and how it is different from a psychologist and social worker. I know that the average person doesn't realize the difference in roles when they are referring to mental health providers. School counselors are trained to identify the needs of the whole school and provide tiered instruction and interventions. At the same time, we have the most extensive background in counseling skills to meet the needs of the students in crisis. This number of students in crisis has significantly rose due to COVID- 19. I am providing more grief counseling than I have in my career so far. When I try to connect parents with outside resources, there are waitlists to find supports. We need to have the most highly qualified mental health professionals working with students right now in schools. I believe strongly that school counselors should be added to this bill.

Another critical piece that only school counselors provide is academic and career support. We are the only mental health professionals that are also trained to teach students academic skills to be successful in school. I am also helping children to explore careers based on their skills, talents, and interests. We all know that job security and happiness is another area that has been directly impacted by COVID 19.

I would ask that the appropriations committee consider appropriating money specifically for school counseling and the hiring of more school counselors. This is important to the future of our children in CT. School Counselors are playing a role more vital then ever in meeting the social and emotional needs of the children in CT.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Marissa Kach
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